

How to Get Started with Your Pet Sitting and Dog Walking Business

One of the most popular questions that we are asked is “how do I get started with my new business”?

Deciding to leave the safety net of full time employment can be daunting and have risks, however once you have decided that you would like to run your own pet sitting or dog walking business, the following steps will help you to get up and running.

1. Market Research

The first step is to research whether there is demand for a pet sitting or dog walking service in your area. Research for this can be carried out online by searching to see whether there are any existing businesses in your area. If there aren't and there are pet owners locally, you will probably find that there is a demand for pet sitting and dog walking. However, even if there are other businesses operating, you can still start your own business, but make sure you think about a Unique Selling Point (USP) like one to one dog walking, additional services like drop off and pick up for home boarding or holiday cover like watering plants and taking in post.

2. What Services Will You Offer?

The first thing to decide is what sort of services you want to offer. Some people do only dog walking, some also offer pop in services like cat sitting or a pop in to let a dog in the garden during the day. You can also offer services where the pet would stay in your own home overnight or during the day like home boarding or doggy day care. Think about whether you would want to offer group walks or just one to one walks, and whether you are happy to look after or walk any sized dog or have a preference for smaller or larger dogs.

3. Making the switch from employed to self employed

It can be daunting to leave employment to work for yourself, especially if you are relying on your income. We recommend starting to advertise your new business around 3 months before you are available to start taking bookings. This way you can start to build up a client base for when you do eventually start your business, and won't be starting without any work booked in.

4. Deciding on a Business Name

When choosing a business name, you need something unique, and something which reflects what sort of business you run. You can check whether your proposed business name is already in use by carrying out a Google search, and we also recommend checking with the Intellectual Property Office (IPO) to ensure that the name has not been trademarked. We always suggest adding your area name to your business name – i.e. Barnsley Dog Walkers, or Pet Sitting Sussex which will help with Google searches.

5. Insurance

Business Insurance is a legal requirement for Pet Sitters and Dog Walkers. NarpsUK has an affiliation with Pet Business Insurance and our Silver and Gold members receive a 25% discount with them. Their policies can be found on our insurance page - <https://www.narpsuk.co.uk/static/pet-sitters-insurance>

6. Criminal Record Check

A Basic Disclosure Criminal Record Check is required by any pet sitter or dog walker who is holding keys. This is also a requirement by most insurance companies. A Basic Disclosure check

can be obtained for a cost of £25 from the gov.uk website. The links to this are also provided in your NarpsUK account area.

7. Licensing

Licenses are required by your local authority if you are boarding dogs in your own home or at a commercial premises, whether this is as a part of a day care facility or overnight. The Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) Regulations 2018 provide all of the details of the requirements of the license, but your local licensing officer can also help you with this. NarpsUK provides all of the template forms and policies that you will need as a part of your license conditions.

8. Forms and Contracts

One of the hardest tasks when starting a business is ensuring that you have the correct paperwork in place to protect yourself and your customers. NarpsUK's silver and gold membership options provide all of the forms, services agreements and contracts you will need for you and your customers. Our service agreements have been drawn up by a Contract Solicitor and are provided in Microsoft Word so they can be amended to include your terms and conditions and to personalise with your logo and business details. All of our forms are also provided in MS Word so you can tailor them to suit you. If you decide not to become a member with us, you can also have these created by appointing a solicitor to do these for you.

9. Managing Your Bookings

A booking system is essential to ensure you are carrying out tasks efficiently and getting paid on time. You may choose to run a paper diary and invoice system, or there are electronic software systems and apps which can help with this. NarpsUK Gold & Bronze members get access to our software which is an online system with an integrated app. We have a two-week free trial of this available. You can also choose to look at our software only package if this is all you need.

10. Training

There is no legal requirement to have qualifications to be a dog walker. The licensing conditions for home boarding and day care stipulate a requirement for an OFQUAL qualification. This should be discussed with your licensing officer as this can vary from one borough to another. NarpsUK offers some training courses which are discounted for its members. These cover a range of subjects from Canine and Feline First Aid to Animal Law.

11. Join an Association

NarpsUK is the leading Association in the UK for pet sitters and dog walkers, by joining us you will have support, advice & guidance whenever you need it regarding all aspects of your business as well as access to everything that has been talked about in this article.

12. Advertising

Most of your advertising and promotion will be through having an online presence, things like Google, Social Media, Yell.com, etc where you can get free listings. These work best when linked to a website. NarpsUK provides a whole range of information sheets to its members about branding, marketing and advertising. As a part of our NarpsUK memberships, you get a 7 page profile on our website with a unique URL which can be used as a mini website.

Further information on the NarpsUK membership packages can be found on our website - <https://www.narpsuk.co.uk/register-choose>

We also offer a free course called 'Introduction to Pet Sitting and Dog Walking' which can be found on the following link - <https://www.pet-sitting-and-dog-walking-courses.co.uk/mod/page/view.php?id=1407>